

FIFTH ANNUAL REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES
OF THE NEW-ENGLAND INSTITUTION
FOR THE EDUCATION OF THE BLIND,
TO THE CORPORATION

by

Samuel G. Howe

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EDUCATION OF THE BLIND.

It is a trite observation, that our language is inadequate to express thought, especially in the investigation of a new and philosophical subject. But there is a yet greater difficulty, that when errors are discovered, or enlarged views acquired, one must continue to use words and figures, which convey to others an opposite meaning. For instance, the philosopher, who sees in decay and death a link in the chain of benevolence, a beautiful provision for the extension of the blessings of life and existence to myriads, instead of thousands, must continue to talk of it as a melancholy thing. If he sees a man fall from a house top, and crush his bones to atoms, he must speak of it as a misfortune, or not at all,—for if he considers it a proof of wisdom and benevolence, that the law of gravitation acts promptly and irresistibly, that the man who fell, as well as himself, ought to rejoice that the law is inexorable,—he must not say it, at least in common language, or he would be deemed mad.

So with blindness : in common language we speak of it as a misfortune ; as a sad fate to which a portion of our race is doomed ; but when we look into the economy of physical nature, and see how it results from the operation of wise and benevolent laws ; or into the economy of the moral world, and see how it effects wise and benevolent ends,—and thus

view it a cause of admiration and gratitude to Divine wisdom, we have no language to express the feeling, but continue to talk of the misfortune, and to say we must bow resignedly, but sadly, to the dark will of God.

The infidel sees in these apparent imperfections of the wonders of nature, a want of foresight or of power in the great Author; the scoffer throws out his taunt about the injustice of unmerited suffering; and even the Christian, when he sees a poor blind man groping his way in utter darkness, from the cradle to the grave, is apt to ask, complainingly, Lord, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

It is true that confiding faith in Divine benevolence, of which the Christian sees a thousand proofs, cannot be shaken by rare or apparent exceptions; and he answers, in the words of him who spake as never man spake, "neither this man, nor his parents did sin, but that the ways of wisdom may be manifested." But how few conceive the full import of these words! how few perceive in this simple language, addressed to simple men, at a period when the science of mind as yet was unknown, all that philosophy and wisdom, during twenty generations, have been only explaining and illustrating!

It would be a work of supererogation in me, to attempt to show, to such an assembly, any of the reasons why congenital physical imperfections, or even intellectual imbecility and idiocy, should be considered as coöperating with every other providence of God, to the welfare and happiness of the human race. The reasons are obvious to all who take a broad view of nature; and even those who do not, have only to consider what man, as he is now constituted, would be, if there were no want, no pain, no affliction in the world. Where would be pleasure, without pain, where sympathy without sorrow, where benevolence without an object?

But the apparent imperfection of nature's works do not exist alone that man may lament them. Sorrow and suffering are not sent into the world merely, that man may be condolent

and charitable : his intellect, as well as his feeling, is to be exerted. There is a task for his head, as well as for his heart ; and he who sets himself resolutely about investigating and remedying an evil to which his mind is subject, is more charitable, and more useful to his fellows, than he who does nothing but give liberal alms, and whose tears are ever ready at a tale of sorrow, or a sight of wo. Science may be more useful to the world than charity, in the common acceptation of the term. The world owes more to Jenner, than though he had founded an hundred hospitals ; and he who should rid the world of pauperism, would do more for it than many Howards ; for the existence of alms and alms-houses is as much the disgrace of society, as amputations are of surgery ;—it is an acknowledgment that the evil cannot be cured.

It is wisely ordained, that there shall ever be inequality among created beings ; an inequality which extends over the moral and intellectual, as well as the physical world. How far the intellectual inequality results from the physical, it behoves me not now to inquire. However much I may be inclined to think that the character of the intellect must be influenced altogether by the character of the physical, I will assume no more than all will grant, viz., that mind can only manifest itself in this state of being, through the body ; that a certain part of this body is more essential to such manifestation than the others ; in a word, that without brain there can be no manifestation of mind, and that, if it exists in a very small quantity, or is very much diseased, the possessor is but an idiot. But this is no more making the brain mind, than the heart is mind ; for, without the action of the heart, the brain is but a lump of fat.

Farther, it is necessary for the full development of mind, that the brain should be acted upon by the external senses ; we must hear, see, taste, smell and touch, in order to know and think. But these senses, or the organs of them, are of secondary consequence ; the brain must exist, or even vegetative life cannot go on ; an idiot may live, and have his

physical being perfectly developed ; an acephalous man could not even exist.

Again, the brain may exist perfectly formed and ready for action, but if the organs of the external senses are wanting, no manifestations of mind can be made through it. Philosophers might once have disputed about what would be the condition of that being who should be without touch, or sight, or smell, or hearing, but the merest tyro in science would be ashamed of wasting an hour upon it now.

You may think I am preaching phrenology to you, gentlemen ; but I am trying to preach only plain common sense. If that and phrenology be one and the same thing, it is not my fault.

Assuming then, what all will grant, that the brain must be acted upon through the senses, in order that mental manifestations may be made through it, the question occurs, whether *all* the organs of sense are necessary ; or whether, when one or more is wanting, compensation may be made by the inferior action of the others ; and if the latter, then which of the organs are of the most consequence.

It must be conceded, that where one of the senses is wanting, the intellect can never be fully developed in all its parts ; nor can compensation be made by the superior activity of other senses. For instance, one function of mind is to perceive and appreciate sounds ;—now if a person is born deaf, he can never by any effort of his own, appreciate, or even conceive of sound. One advantage of sound, indeed,—that of conveying ideas by spoken language,—he may receive in another way, by visible signs, or by written characters. But this is part only of the function of hearing ; it is one way only by which the auditory nerve affects the brain. To all the rest, the mind must be a stranger. Now the question occurs,—and an important one it is too,—which of the senses are most important for the development of mind, and which should be made use of in education. Leaving aside the abstruse question, whether all

the senses may not be reduced to a modification of touch,—as the ear touching or feeling vibrations of the air, the eye touching rays of light,—we say, in common language that the sight is the most important of the senses. This is undeniably the case with regard to the physical world, and all our relations with matter; but it is a question, whether for all the abstract sciences, for the study of the moral and intellectual nature of man, the hearing is not more important; and I shall afterwards show why a person who should be reduced to the alternative of losing his sight or his hearing, ought unhesitatingly to say, let me be blind rather than deaf; shut up the windows of the body, through which I see only beautiful and curious arrangements of matter, but leave open that wider avenue, through which comes the voice of affection and the action of mind.

When we consider man as a race, we find that the external senses are modified in as many ways as there are individuals; some have one sense very acute, and another dull; some have a modification of two acute, and three dull; and so on, in an endless combination, equalled only by the variety of physiognomy.

Among the modifications, we find it a law of nature, that a certain proportion of every generation shall be born deaf, or blind. I say a law, because it has the characteristics of a natural law; it applies to all countries and to all ages. We have now to consider blindness, and inquire what is the average proportion of those who are born blind, and how far this proportion is dependent upon an uncontrollable decree of God, or how far He has left it to be decided by man's obedience or disobedience of the natural organic laws. When we have decided this, we are to see how far the powers of man may be competent to palliate the effects of a circumstance,—I will not call it evil,—which he cannot prevent.

There can be no more striking proof of the value of statistical details, than their indispensable necessity in the investigation of blindness and similar infirmities. Had we exact knowl-

edge of the number of congenitally blind persons in several countries and sections of countries, and through a long series of years, we might ascertain how far it was dependent upon man's disobedience of the organic laws of his nature, and how far upon the inscrutable, but immutable constitution of things. In the absence of such information, we can only make an approximation to the truth.

As a general rule, then, blindness is more frequent in the equatorial regions, and decreases as we approach the poles. Local causes, however, modify this general rule. Thus Egypt, Abyssinia, and the neighboring regions, are *par excellence* the countries of the blind. In Egypt, particularly, the proportion of blind to the whole population, is sadly great; some writers put as high as one in the hundred, making thirty thousand blind. My own observations induce me to think that the proportion is considerably less, perhaps one in three hundred, or ten thousand to the whole country; though the number of persons with one eye, or distorted eyes, is much greater. In Europe, the proportion generally is about one in fifteen hundred persons; in this country one in about eighteen hundred; or about seven thousand five hundred to the whole country! Is it possible, you may exclaim;—can it be, that from seven to eight thousand of our fellow creatures are at this moment, and in our country, sitting in darkness? Can it be, that this morning's sun, which shines so brightly and cheerily upon us, is to so many thousands around us but a heated, blackened mass? Can it be, that the green and beauteous garb which nature now wears, is to so many but a dark and gloomy pall? Aye! it is but too true, and although, as we shall afterwards see, that the blind are not necessarily the sad and cheerless sufferers we should suppose them to be, it becomes every one to consider how the number may be diminished, or the situation of the whole ameliorated. That the proportion of the blind to the whole population might be diminished by wise social regulations, and by the dissemination of knowledge of the

organic laws of man, there is not a doubt ; but whether the time has come, or ever will come, is another question. At any rate, to so enlightened a body as I have the honor of addressing, suggestions of methods by which the extent of blindness may be limited, will neither be misapplied, nor liable to offend a mawkish sensibility. That the blindness of a large proportion of society is a social evil, will not be denied ; nor will the right which society has to diminish that proportion be questioned. But how ?—in a very simple way,—by preventing the transmission of an hereditary blindness to another generation ;—by preventing the marriage of those who are congenitally blind, or who have lost their sight by reason of a hereditary weakness of the visual organs, which disqualifies them to resist the slightest inflammation or injury in childhood.

I am aware that many people would condemn this proposition, as cruel ; because it might add to the sadness of the sufferers ; and that the whole seven thousand five hundred blind would rise up and scout it, as barbarous and unnatural ; for I have experienced the effects of contradiction to the wills of individual blind persons in this respect. But my rule is, the good of the community, before that of the individual ; the good of the race, before that of the community. To give you an instance ;—the city of Boston, with a population of eighty thousand, is represented in the Institution for the Blind, by two blind children only ; and I know of but four in the whole population. While Andover, with but five thousand, is fully and ably represented by seven ; and it has three more growing up.

Now, how is this ? Why, the blind of Andover are mostly from a common stock ; three of them are born of one mother, who has had four blind children. Another of the pupils is cousin, in the first degree, to these three ; and two other pupils are cousins in a remote degree.

Then, from other places, there are two brothers, who have

a third at home. There is one blind girl, who has two blind sisters at home. Then there are two pairs of sisters.

In the immediate vicinity of Boston, I know a family in which blindness is hereditary; the last generation there were five. Of those five, one is married, and has four children,—not one of whom can see well enough to read. And if the others marry, they may increase the number to twelve or twenty.

Now, apply this state of things to the whole country, and have you any difficulty in conceiving how it happens, that there are seven thousand five hundred blind in the United States? And can you doubt whether or not this great proportion of blind to the whole community, might not be considerably diminished, if men and women understood the organic laws of their nature,—understood that, very often, blindness is the punishment following an infringement of the natural laws of God; and if they could be made to act upon the holy Christian principles that we should deny ourselves any individual gratification, any selfish desire, that may result in evil to the community?

I would that every individual, whom I have the honor to address, would assist in the education of the blind, so far as to give them just and Christian views of this subject. I would that all should work for society, not for society to-day alone, but for the society of future ages;—not in any one narrow, partial way, but upon a broad scale; and in every way in which they can be useful. If a person congenitally blind, or strongly predisposed to become so, or one who marries a person so born, or so predisposed, has blind offspring in consequence of it, I ask, is he not as responsible, in a moral point of view, for the infirmity of his children, as though he had put out their eyes with his own hands?

You may suppose, perhaps, that the infirmity of blindness would incapacitate the sufferers from winning the affections of

seeing persons ; and that with respect to two blind persons, the sense of incapacity to support a family would prevent them from uniting themselves. In the first place, I answer, that seeing people do no better than the blind. Even a blind man may perceive that many marriages are mere matters of course, resulting from juxtaposition of parties, and rarely matters where the purer affections and higher moral sentiments are consulted. And, in the second place, that incapacity of supporting a family will not weigh a feather in the balance with desire, unless the intellectual and moral nature is enlightened and cultivated. Do we not see, every day, cases of misery entailed upon whole families, because one of the parents had overlooked, or disregarded moral infirmity, which ought to have been a greater objection than any physical defect,—than even blindness or deafness ?

But no process of reasoning is required ; for there stand the facts. The blind not only seek for partners in life, but are sometimes sought by seeing persons ; and numerous instances have occurred within my knowledge. It is true, that despair of success in any other quarter, or an equally unworthy motive, may induce some to seek for partners among the blind, or the blind to unite with the blind ; but still, there is the evil.

My observation induces me to think that the blind, far *more* than seeing persons, are fond of social relations, and desirous of family endearments. A moment's thought would induce one to conclude, that this would naturally be the case ; a moment's observation convinces one that it is so. Now, I have found among them, some of the most pious, intelligent and disinterested beings I ever knew ; but hardly more than one, who was prepared to forego the enjoyments of domestic relations. And how can we expect them to be so, more than seeing people ? The fact is, but very few persons in the community give any attention to the laws of their organic nature, and the tendency to hereditary transmission of infirmities. Very few consider, that they owe more to society than to their

individual selves;—that if we are to love our neighbor *as ourselves*, we must, of course, love *all* our neighbors collectively more than the single unit which each one calls *I*.

I would that considerations of this kind had more weight in the community generally. I would that the subject were more attended to, and that the violation of the laws of our organic nature were less frequent in our country. There is one great and crying evil in our system of education,—it is, that but part of man's nature is educated;—and that our colleges and schools doom young men for years, to an uninterrupted and severe exercise of the intellectual faculties, to the comparative neglect of their moral, and still more of their physical nature. Nay, not only do they *neglect* their physical nature,—they abuse it,—they sin against themselves, and against God; and though they sin in ignorance, they do not escape the penalties of His violated laws. Hence, you see them, pale, and wan, and feeble;—hence, you find them acknowledging, when too late, the effects of severe application. But do they acknowledge it humbly and repentingly, as with a consciousness of sin? No; they often do it with a secret exultation,—with a lurking feeling, that you will say, or think, “poor fellow, his mind is too much for his body!”—Nonsense! his mind is too weak,—his knowledge too limited,—he is an imperfect man,—he knows not his own nature. But, if he has no conscientiousness,—no scruple about impairing his own health and sowing the seeds of disease,—he has less about entailing them upon others. And a consumptive young man or woman,—the son or daughter of consumptive parents,—hesitates not to spread the evil in society, and entail puny frames, weakness, pain, and early death upon several individuals, and punish their children for their own sins.

Is this picture too high colored? Alas! no. And if I showed you satisfactorily, that sin against the organic laws caused so large a proportion of blindness, how much more readily will you grant, that the same sin gives to so many of

our population the narrow chest, the hectic flush, the hollow cough, which makes the *victim doomed* by his *parent* to consumption and early death!

Do you not see, every Sabbath, at church, the young man or woman, upon whose fair and delicate structure the peculiar impress of the EARLY DOOMED is stamped; and as a slight, but hollow cough comes upon your ear, does it not recall the death knell, which rang in the same sad note before, to the father or the mother? Who of you has not followed some young friend to his long resting-place, and found that the grass had not grown rank upon the grave of his brother,—that the row of white marbles, beneath which slept his parents and sisters, were yet glistening in freshness, and that the letters which told their names and their early death, seemed clear as if cut but yesterday?

They tell us that physical education is attended to in this country;—and yet, where is the teacher, where is the clergyman even, who dares to step forth in these cases, and say to those who are *doomed*, you must not and shall not marry; and where are the young men and women who would listen to them if they did? It is not that they are wanting in conscientiousness; they may be conscientious and disinterested, but they do not know they are doing wrong, because they are not acquainted with all the organic laws of their nature. All that is done in schools or colleges toward physical education, is the mere strengthening of the muscular system by muscular exercise, but this not half enough. These remarks may be deemed irrelevant to my subject,—but they cannot be lost to an audience, whose highest interest is the education of man; and, if I am mistaken in supposing that little attention has been paid to the subject, its importance will guaranty its repetition.

Thus, I have presented to you some considerations of means by which the proportion of blind to the whole community might be materially lessened. I might go on, and point out others, such as early and immediate attention to inflammation of

the eyes in infancy. I might show how advancing science, in this, as in a thousand other ways, tends directly to benefit society; and how a knowledge of ophthalmia,—a little more perfect than is now generally possessed by country physicians,—would diminish the number of blind; this, however, would be generalizing too much. But after all, when man shall have become ever so well acquainted with the laws of his organic nature, and ever so obedient to them, there will still be a certain proportion of every generation deprived of one or more of the organs of sense. It is my part to point out the means of educating those who are without sight.

The subject is an interesting and important one, whether viewed philosophically, or practically. Its full illustration requires an intimate acquaintance with the best systems of common education, and they might reflect back much light upon them. I would, indeed, that I possessed much acquaintance, or the power to make it useful to other methods; but I must plead ignorance, and crave your forbearance, if the crudity of my remarks betray a want of familiarity with what is the vocation of many of my auditors,—the science of teaching.

I hold, then, that education should have for its aim, the development and greatest possible perfection of the whole nature of man:—his moral, intellectual, and physical nature. My *beau idéal* of human nature would be, a being whose intellectual faculties were active and enlightened,—whose moral sentiments were dignified and firm,—whose physical formation was healthy and beautiful;—whoever falls short of this, in one particular,—be it in but the least,—beauty and vigor of body falls short of the standard of perfection. To this standard, I believe, man is approaching; and I believe the time will soon be, when specimens of it will not be rare.

In educating the blind, we meet with one insurmountable obstacle to perfection in the physical nature of man;—we cannot make the body perfect. Let us see how far the imperfection prevents the development and improvement of the

other parts of his nature. With regard to the intellectual, we find that almost all the powers of the mind can be developed by being acted upon through the other senses. And with regard to the moral and religious nature, it varies not materially from other human beings. We need then consider only the physical and intellectual nature.

In the education of the physical, we have great difficulty to encounter. Very often, blindness is one effect of a cause which occasions general derangement of health; thus we have not only the deprivation of one sense, but a weak and puny physical frame. Then, in most cases, where the only original defect is blindness, this itself causes derangement of health, by preventing the person from taking sufficient quantity of exercise to develop the powers of the different organs, or keep them in healthy action when they are developed. Generally speaking, the blind suffer much from want of exercise;—they cannot run fearlessly about, like other children; and even the degree of exercise which the natural buoyancy of childhood would lead them to take, is diminished by the timidity or ignorance of their parents and friends, who fear they will hurt themselves. Instead of being encouraged to run about, and tumble, and frolic, the blind child is too often cautioned to sit still, or to be very careful in its movements. Later in life, in the period of youth, we find them cautious in their movements, and very much inclined to sit quiet in the house; or if they endeavor to take exercise, they are at once fatigued and discouraged;—they complain of lassitude, and attribute to their own weakness what is but the effect of previous bad habits. Following this, a natural consequence, come a long train of physical and moral evils, of which peevishness and discontent are but a small part.

This is a point which deserves particular attention. And if there are any of my hearers who know a blind child in their neighborhood, they can do no kinder act to it, than to advise its parents how to treat it. They should encourage, rather

than repress motion,—they should not be over careful about removing things out of its way, but let it learn, by tumbling over them, how to avoid them in future. It should be made to run and jump about,—to be much in the open air;—and, above all things, it should be made to practise its ear and touch, in every possible way. There is little danger of harm;—nature is there, ever watchful,—and the mother's love, increased by the infirmity of her child, will never let it really suffer. Although, unenlightened by instinct, she may help it into helplessness, and caress it into imbecility. I have known blind children, who, at the age of ten, had never been taught (I will not say taught, but never had been allowed), to dress themselves, or to run about, or even to feed themselves; while, in the Institution in this city, you may see little fellows, less than five years of age, who give more trouble to keep them quiet, than moving;—who run fearlessly all over the building; and through the play grounds,—who sit at table, and help themselves, and who can tell the footstep of almost every one of the sixty inmates, and even of the cat and dog.

Much depends upon the early education of the senses; and it is surprising to those who have not attended to the subject, how great is their susceptibility of improvement. You have, doubtless, all of you, heard and known cases of astonishing acuteness of perception, in those deprived of one or more organs of sense; and I shall merely allude to a few of them, to show how far the blind are compensated for want of sight. I have known blind persons, who could tell on entering a room to which they were accustomed, whether any large article of furniture had been removed, merely by the sound of their footsteps or cane upon the floor;—who could tell the difference in height between two persons with whom they were talking (even when it was not more than three inches), and this by the direction in which the sound of the voice came to their ear. I have known blind men, who could tell the ages of persons as accurately by their voices, as any of us can by their counte-

nances. To cap the climax, I know a girl who pretended to tell colors by the touch; this, a moment's reflection will tell you, is impossible,—for there is nothing appreciable, much less tangible, in those different qualities of different substances, which makes them reflect different colored rays of light; light itself is not tangible,—how much less a red or a blue ray. Nevertheless, this blind girl could distinguish a piece of red cloth from a black or white one; and she did it by an acuteness of sense almost incredible. She laid the different colored pieces of cloth upon a table, or in the sun, until they had attained the same temperature. She then applied them to her lips successively, and knew which was white, because it felt the warmest. In other words, she knew by her senses what the chemist has learned by delicate experiment and accurate instruments, that different colors conduct caloric with different degrees of facility.

Now, facts of this kind ought not to be lost, either to the education of the blind, or of seeing persons. It shows how much we, all of us, neglect our senses,—how very imperfect we allow them to remain. Blind children, particularly, should be made to feel of every thing, to learn the density, weight, smoothness, smell, resonance, &c., of all bodies within their reach. Now, should these things be neglected in common schools? The fact is, that an impression upon the mind is more vivid, when made through two senses, than through but one. It is like several witnesses to one fact. Tell a boy that the sting of a bee is very acutely pointed, and he will believe it; let him look at it with the eye or a glass, and the impression is strengthened; but, let it sting him, and he will never forget it. We do not act enough on this principle in schools. It is common to show a boy by a very pretty piece of apparatus, that he may raise a great weight with a small power, by a lever; but it is better to have a weight of two hundred pounds there, and a lever to lift it, and to let the boy use it. Nor

would such kind of apparatus for the mechanical powers, be much more expensive than common ones.

But to go on with the education of a blind child. I said he must be allowed, and even encouraged, to feel of and examine things. Nothing is more difficult than to keep them out of mischief, without repressing this desire of examining things. To tell a blind child not to feel of things around him, is like telling a seeing child not to roll his eyes about, and look at certain forbidden objects. The only way is, to keep such things out of their reach.

It is curious to witness the workings of nature in a blind child, who has found some new object;—he first feels it all over,—he pinches it,—he tries to pick a hole in it; then he smells of it,—then puts it to his tongue,—then rattles it, or if it will not make a noise, he feels for a stone, or a bit of metal and strikes it,—holding it to his ear, and listening to its sound. Believe me, that boy with his energies properly directed, gets more valuable knowledge of things about him, than many a round-eyed dolt, who is satisfied with stupidly staring at them.

Blind children should be thrown upon their own physical resources,—made to exercise and develop their physical organs; and be put early in the way of learning;—that is, put in a way of learning for themselves;—for, as some politicians adopt as their newspaper motto, “the world is too much governed.” I have thought a similar one might be well placed over some schools or colleges,—“the world is too much *taught*.” I mean that children learn too much by rote, and exercise the mind too little. They learn merely words and ideas of others; they get lessons by heart as a task, and run away delighted to play, and in one hour often learn more than in the three that the master kept them shut up. The instructor's art should be to make his pupil *work* with his mind, and to work too, *con amore*,

In the education of blind children, there is one evil, which it is very important, and yet almost impossible to obviate;—I mean a sense of dependence and inferiority. Now, this is not a natural feeling. Want of self-esteem is not a necessary consequence of blindness; but they so continually hear expressions of pity,—there are so many silly persons, who think it is fine and sentimental to show emotion, and express condolence,—that the chance is, a blind child is caught up two or three times a day, and kissed, and wept over, and lamented, until he learns to regard himself as different from other children,—as a peculiar object of misfortune, and entirely unfit to provide for his own wants. He grows up either a petted, spoiled and fretful youth, or he becomes an inactive, irresolute, desponding and helpless young man. Some few escape this, it is true; but there is hardly one in a thousand, and fewer than that among females. They have, generally, a morbid sensitiveness to the opinion of others. Their love of approbation is predominant; but their self-esteem and firmness are wanting;—they are affected to tears, by the slightest reproof;—they are unfitted to bear the shocks and crosses of real life. And a great part of the time spent in educating those who are advanced, must be devoted to overcoming the morbid sensibility acquired in their intercourse with silly sentimentalism at home.

I am the more unforbearing with this kind of treatment of the blind, because it often comes from persons entirely wanting in true benêvolence. They will give a tear, but nothing more;—they are profuse in expressions of sympathy and condolence, and often love to be so;—they love to have these “very disagreeable emotions” excited, upon the principle that some people attend executions. Or, they think better of themselves, and feel more content with themselves, from the contrast;—they do not ask (many would hardly care), what would be the effect of their misplaced sympathy, and their long-drawn sighs, upon those who are the objects of them.

A blind child should never be allowed to consider himself

as an unfortunate creature. He is not unfortunate ; he has existence, and that is a boon ; he has senses, and those are blessings ;—and though others may have one more, they are none the less to be valued ; he has an illimitable mind, an immortal soul, and those are blessings ; he has talents, and though others have more, his are not to be buried in the earth. But we shall see, that he has compensating powers,—that he has means of improvement and enjoyment ;—and that although organized as the world now is, things could not go on well if all or half of mankind were blind ;—yet that here and there, one may live as happily, as usefully, and as independently as those who see. The blind child should be taught, from his youth, to thank God that he enjoys the boon of existence, upon the terms that it is given him. He should be taught reliance upon himself, confidence in his own resources, and hope of happiness and usefulness in life.

But I fancy some of my hearers are ready to exclaim, impatiently, when shall we hear about the education of the blind,—when will you tell us how they learn to read and write ? I have already touched upon the most important part of the subject,—their moral and intellectual training. As for the instruction, it is altogether a secondary and minor affair.

People generally imagine it must be very difficult to teach the blind ; but they are wrong. To teach the blind, is the easiest thing in the world. And I will venture to say, that a class of blind children, from the Institution in this city, will learn as much, in a given time, of history, geography, astronomy, or the languages, as any class that could be selected from the high schools and academies ; and that, of mathematics and music, they will learn more. To *teach* the blind is easy,—to educate them is altogether another matter.

A comparison is sometimes drawn between the situation and the instruction of the deaf mutes and the blind ; but there is no other resemblance, than that the *modus operandi* is different from the one pursued with seeing children. The advantages

are altogether on the side of the blind ;—for the deaf mutes, a language is to be invented ; and when it is invented, perfected and learned, how inadequate is it to the full and free communication of ideas. But with the blind, there is no such obstacle,—the medium is a common one, and we can have the most free and illimitable interchange of thought and feeling.

The moral and religious feelings of the deaf mutes are generally dormant when they enter institutions for their education ; while the blind differ not from seeing people, and partake of the stamp of those with whom they have associated.

If you wish to teach a deaf mute geography, for instance, you must first teach him language. With a blind boy, you have only to begin to describe the country ;—you give him his lesson orally, instead of his reading and studying in a book. You teach a blind boy in the same way you would teach a seeing boy,—except that you read or lecture to the blind boy, while you let the seeing boy read for himself. The only difference is in the artificial aids,—books, maps, diagrams, slates, &c.,—and these are small matters. You have only to imagine that all your books, maps, slates, &c., were taken from your school,—the room darkened, and you required to keep on teaching your scholars ; you will then conceive, at once, how the blind are taught. If you wished to inform them the difference between an acute and an obtuse angle, and failed to do so by words, you would mark it upon the palms of their hands, or you would have the figure stamped on a piece of paper, and give it to them to feel. Now, what you would do with your scholars in the dark, we have to do with the blind in the light. Such is the general principle,—as to the *quo modo*, it is of less consequence. But as there is a considerable interest manifested in the subject, I will go into some detail.

When a blind boy first enters an institution, he is put under the charge of a blind pupil, about his own age, whose first duty it is to show the new comer all over the premises.

It is interesting to see the blind thus leading the blind. The one pushes on ahead fearlessly, up stairs and down, almost drawing the other, who follows timidly, feeling in front of him with one hand, and trying every spot with one foot placed doubtingly down, before he will trust the weight of the body to it. When he has become familiar with the premises and the grounds, the new comer is placed at a desk in the school-room, and a sheet with the letters of the alphabet stamped or embossed, so as to be tangible,—these he learns in a day or two, and then goes on with the rest.

The pupils, in the Institution in this city, are taught the same branches, and about to the same degree, as are learned in our high schools and academies. English grammar, arithmetic, geography and history, and music to all. The higher branches of mathematics and astronomy,—the French language,—natural and moral philosophy, to such as desire a more finished education.

As I said, most of the instruction is oral, but much aid, particularly in geography and mathematics, is derived from ingenious contrivances, by which the illustrations are made tangible. With the books for the blind, you are probably all acquainted;—they are printed without ink, and the form of the letter elevated or embossed, and made tangible. The system has been very much improved within a short time, in this country, and the books printed here for the blind have an immense advantage over those of Europe, in diminished bulk and expense, and increased beauty and clearness.

Such are some of the contrivances, by which the artificial aids in common schools are adapted to the wants of the blind; and by them, rude and imperfect as they are, rapid progress is made. It is true the processes are slow, and a blind child cannot read but one third as fast as seeing children;—but, then, he devotes himself with threefold energy,—he studies with pleasure unalloyed, and his mind, undiverted by visible objects, is intent upon the subject he is investigating. Hence, as I

said before, he makes as rapid progress in most intellectual pursuits, and more rapid progress in some, than seeing boys in schools and academies.

But there is a department of knowledge which opens to them a wide and pleasant career, and upon which they enter with zeal and success;—I mean that of music. Here the blind youth fears not the competition of his seeing rivals. A little attention, on the part of the teacher, gives him a scientific knowledge of the principles; and, guided by his pure and unerring ear, and enraptured by harmony, which he tastes in all its perfection, he advances rapidly to excellence. Already, the institutions of this country have nearly qualified many blind persons for organists; and there is no doubt but the increase of musical taste in the community will enable all to find useful and honorable occupations.

Attention, and considerable attention, is to be paid to physical exercise; and all the pupils in an institution for the blind should devote considerable time to it. At the one in this city, they have a gymnasium, where the boys acquire great hardihood and skill, while they strengthen the muscles and relax the mind. All spend, too, several hours daily in mechanical occupations; and those who have no talent for music devote themselves entirely to work, after they have spent time enough in school to obtain a knowledge of the common branches,—arithmetic, grammar, geography, &c.

There are some occupations in which they can compete with seeing workmen. The Institution in this city has already qualified four blind persons to obtain a livelihood by their own hands, and they are actually obtaining it.

But, in order to estimate fully the advantages of educating the blind, you should see a boy or girl as they come from the country, and compare them with themselves after four years. They are at first awkward, ignorant, and timid; without self-confidence, and without physical strength or moral energy. Ill-judged kindness, by forestalling their wants, has prevented

them from action; and unwise treatment has made them consider themselves sad burdens upon others, and always destined to be so. But they soon find they must rouse themselves, and administer to their own wants; they find themselves in a community of blind, and, undepressed by any sense of inferiority, they are excited to rivalry and competition. The acquisition of knowledge gives them great pleasure;—confinement in school gives zest to the hours of exercise;—hope spreads a bright picture before them,—and time, which once dragged along so heavily, now speeds on gaily, and his wings make music as he flies. Soon you see them become active, intelligent, self-confident and happy.

It is a common error, to suppose blindness, in itself, is a cause of great unhappiness to the sufferer. It is very seldom so with those who have been long blind, unless they have inordinate self-esteem, and are envious of seeing people. Generally speaking, the want of sight is regretted by them, as the want of an advantage, and not of a pleasure. The man born blind, knows that it must be advantageous to have an organ of touch, by which he could make himself acquainted with a distant grove or landscape; feel the size and shape of the trees, the form of the leaves, the inequality of the ground, &c.;—and if he could have his hands so constituted as to give him all this knowledge, he would like it;—but as for the pleasures to be derived, separate from any advantage, he cannot have any adequate conception of them; and, therefore, very wisely, he troubles not his head about them.

If, then, blindness is not necessarily a cause of unhappiness,—why is the lot of the blind so sad? Why are they generally considered the greatest objects of sympathy and suffering? Why do they have to pass their lives in listlessness and inactivity,—their youth in the chimney-nook, or in the rocking-chair,—eating the bread of dependence at the table of a kind relative, and when he is gone, doomed to pass their old age in an almshouse? Why are they generally weak, inactive,

moping and useless? Why are they burdens upon society,—and why do so many sink into stupidity and idiocy, and die of premature old age?

It is because the *feelings* have been listened to and followed, without thought or reasoning;—the sympathy and pity of men called instantaneously forth by the situation of the blind, has acted impulsively, and alms and almshouses have been liberally supplied. The very means intended to solace and relieve the blind, have often added to their suffering, by making them peculiar and ostensible objects of charity. Ay, the very hand that has been stretched out to cheer and solace, has often wounded and crushed them! The situation of the blind has not been understood,—the wants of the blind have not been known,—and, of course, not supplied. Alms cannot console them,—charity cannot cheer them;—they have faculties, and they want to have them employed;—they have moral and intellectual natures which require to be developed and cultivated, and until this is done, and until self-esteem can be gratified by earning their own subsistence, and making themselves independent of charity, they will never be happy,—never fill that place in society which they are able to do.

If there is any one class in our community, whose claim upon society is clear and indisputable, it is the blind. If any one class has been peculiarly and long neglected, it is the blind. We recognise the right of all the young to a participation in the blessings of education. We have long provided the means for all:—for white and black,—for the poorest as well as the richest,—even for the deaf and dumb; while the blind,—with capacity equal to any,—with wants greater, far greater than any,—have been entirely neglected until within a few years! Compare the situation and wants of a blind person, with those of a deaf mute. The one can move about in the world, he can go into a carpenter's shop, or a shoemaker's shop, learn a trade and become independent, and comparatively happy. But the blind man,—he is helpless. If unassisted

and unenlightened by a peculiar provision for his education, he must pass his days in ignorance and idleness, and often end them in an almshouse. And yet, while institutions for the education of the deaf and dumb have long been established, and are rapidly increasing, those for the blind are but just commencing. Thank God, however, the work has commenced; and in a community like ours, it cannot but go on. Already have two of our institutions placed themselves on a footing with,—nay, I may safely say, in some respects, have excelled,—the best and oldest in Europe;—and there is nothing more ardently to be desired, than to see them multiplied and perfected.

It is but four years since the American public have learned that the blind could be educated;—it is but four years since a call has been made upon their sympathies and charities, in behalf of this interesting class,—and yet, the call has been answered promptly and generously. The work has been begun with zeal and resolution; more progress has been made here, than in the last twenty years elsewhere;—and there is now, for the first time, a rational prospect of a select and valuable library being soon printed for the blind. Already has the best of books, the New Testament, been finished, of which only short extracts had been printed abroad; and hope says, it is but the earnest of many more. That our country may be the first to discharge its duty to those who are rendered its dependents, is to be ardently desired by every patriot and philanthropist.

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fifth annual report of the trustees
of the new-England institution for
the education of the blind, To the
copporation by Samuel G. Howe

Date Due			

